

Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta



As we wind our way through the second half of winter, the seasonal shift to colder temperatures, shorter days and longer nights can sometimes leave people feeling irritable, tired, and just plain “heavy.” Having a dedicated winter wellness routine can help boost the mood, sharpen the mind, and energize the body. In this newsletter we will highlight a few tips for winter wellness and see how wellness is promoted among clients and staff at Connecticut Valley Hospital.

With February being Black History Month, it is important to note that only [one in three](#) Black adults who need mental health care receive it. According to the American Psychiatric Association’s [Mental Health Facts for African Americans](#) guide, Black adults are also less likely to receive guideline-consistent care, less frequently included in research, and more likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists). This underscores the importance of community and cultural competence when it comes to finding mental health support. Going forward, we will continue to highlight further information and mental health support and resources for the Black community.

Read on for more important resources and news from the Department. Now that we have made it past the Winter Solstice, days are getting longer and temperatures will slowly but surely begin to rise. Only 23 more days until Spring!

Winter Wellness Resources: Toivo

Toivo is a peer-run, non-profit initiative that includes statewide classes, workshops and a center for holistic healing and stress management. Toivo offers a wide variety of classes, workshops, and support groups both online as well as at its holistic healing and stress management center* in Hartford as well as across Connecticut. All activities are facilitated by expertly trained staff who use their passion and skills to create an engaging and trauma-informed experience.

Offerings include yoga, meditation, qigong, sound healing, laughter yoga, drumming, creative expression, healing arts, support groups and more. Visit the Toivo website to learn more.



(*TOIVO CENTER IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED – [CLICK HERE](#) TO SEE ONLINE OFFERINGS)



Substance Use Prevention

The recent spate of youth overdoses and instances of young people ingesting substances at school that made them ill underscores the need for prevention to begin at home. Small conversations make a big impact. Talk to your children, early and often, about the dangers of substance misuse. SAMHSA's ["Talk. They Hear You." Campaign](#) has resources to help parents and caregivers to help start the conversation, including a mobile app. Visit the [DMHAS Prevention and Health Promotion page](#) for more resources and information about statewide prevention initiatives.



Wellness Programs at Connecticut Valley Hospital

The month of January is designated as Mental Wellness Month. Mental wellness refers to having positive characteristics that allow you to thrive, even during times of stress. There is no better time than the beginning of a new year to take stock of your mental health and learn new ways to improve your overall well-being.

At Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) there are a variety of offerings, from art, dance, and music therapy to sensory integration opportunities and yoga. [Healing from Within](#) groups in conjunction with [Toivo](#) are offered, and CVH also participates in the Recovering Citizens Learning Collaborative, where agencies funded by DMHAS learn about conducting citizenship-oriented care at their facilities and share successes and struggles. The goal of the Collaborative is to create a culture of community in order to prepare persons in recovery for their reintegration to the community of their choice.

At CVH, both staff and clients are encouraged to participate in wellness programming, as it serves as an important form of support. Wellness programs are not specific to any one gender or population, and reach every aspect of our lives allowing us to bring our best self forward.



Spotlight: Luiza Barnat, Opioid Services Director



Last year, Luiza Barnat was promoted to DMHAS Opioid Services Director. In this role, she oversees DMHAS' Opioid Response, coordinating with other state agencies, managing the State Opioid Response (SOR) grant, and contracts with community providers.

Luiza coordinates with facility CEOs and senior managers to ensure a continuum of opioid harm reduction, prevention, treatment and recovery services. She also facilitates the Treatment Subcommittee of the [Alcohol and Drug Policy Council](#) with the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

[Click to learn more about DMHAS Opioid Services](#)

What do you love most about your job?

I love the diversity of projects that are part of the response to the opioid crisis. These projects are innovative and move systems to accommodate people in new ways. The most rewarding part of the job is watching barriers be removed and individuals getting support through programs such as mobile outreach and medication assisted treatment, recovery coaching, or faith based interventions. The ability to partner with so many great people in Connecticut, who represent the treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support systems makes every day interesting.

Are there any challenges?

The greatest challenge is that the opioid crisis continues to affect so many communities in Connecticut and across the country. The pandemic unfortunately has caused increased isolation, with less individuals accessing treatment or having their treatment routines disrupted.

What can we look for from the Opioid Services Division in the near future?

The opioid group continues to evaluate ways to support more outreach and engagement efforts. There will be a harm reduction conference on May 20, and continued presentations of the CT Response to the Opioid Crisis webinar series. We continue to support media campaigns including LiveLOUD (liveloud.org) and anti-stigma messaging on websites, social media, and billboards throughout the state.

We expect to continue to increase access to naloxone by distributing kits to treatment and recovery support providers.

Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative

The Departments of Labor, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Public Health have created the [Recovery Friendly Initiative](https://www.recoveryworksct.org) to provide a road map to create an environment that reduces the stigma related to substance use disorders and encourages employees to engage in recovery efforts. For more information visit www.recoveryworksct.org.





Colleen Harrington, LCSW, MBA, has been named Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. As Deputy Commissioner, Colleen will continue to be a trusted leader with strong operational, administrative, clinical and financial management skills necessary to navigate a dynamic healthcare environment. Congratulations, Colleen!

Webinar Series: Connecticut's Response to the Opioid Crisis

The DMHAS webinar series highlighting the Statewide Opioid Response continues with a discussion on Outreach and Engagement on February 28 at 12:00 p.m. [Click here to join.](#)

To see previous webinars, visit [DMHAS Opioid Services.](#)

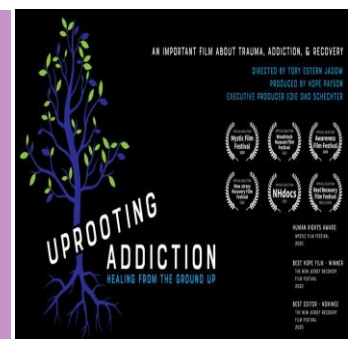


While Addiction is Deadlier Than Ever, Research Shows Most Americans Heal (NPR, 1/20/22)

The U.S. is facing the deadliest drug overdose epidemic in its history, but there is hope. Research shows most people with addiction do survive and recover, especially when they get quality treatment. [Story.](#)

Uprooting Addiction

This important film looks at the national substance use crisis that is ravaging local communities across the U.S., including right here in Connecticut. It is a portrait of a single community coming together to take on one of the most critical challenges of our time. [View here free for a limited time.](#)



Stories Wanted!

We are always looking for resources, accomplishments and good news to highlight. If there is something you would like to see highlighted in an upcoming newsletter please get in touch with Art Mongillo at Arthur.Mongillo@ct.gov.

